

## Diversity in times of austerity: Documenting resistance in the academy

David Moscovitz, Terri Jett, Terri Carney, Tamara Leech, and Ann Savage

### *Abstract*

What happens to feminism in the university is parallel to what happens to feminism in other venues under economic restructuring: while the impoverished nation is forced to cut social services and thereby send women back to the hierarchy of the family, the academy likewise reduces its footprint in interdisciplinary structures and contains academic feminists back to the hierarchy of departments and disciplines. When the family and the department become powerful arbiters of cultural values, women and feminist academics by and large suffer: they either accept a diminished role or are pushed to compete in a system they recognize as antithetical to the foundational values of feminist priorities of social justice. Collaborative work to nurture diversity and interdisciplinarity does not register as individual accomplishment. This paper considers the necessity of this type of academic work to further the vision of a society committed to the collective values espoused by feminism and other areas in social justice.

### *Introduction*

What happens to women and feminism in the academy in times of economic austerity is complicated, and is shaped by a curiously bifurcated path: they can either revert to tradition, typically operationalized in university structures as “department” or “discipline,” or flourish under problematic conditions of “innovation” that entangle them in the neoliberal machine.<sup>1</sup> As societies “liquefy” and move towards a market-led culture, social identity becomes untethered from collective power (Bauman 2011), weakening the value and visibility of the collaborative work and collective subjectivities of feminist academics.

When feminist academics are either remanded back to the family/department or asked to compete as entrepreneurs, their work is rendered invisible, as the reward structure demands discipline-specific, easily countable work that is executed by individuals. Initiatives deemed “innovative” typically come not from a collective but rather from “entrepreneurial” individuals (Kniffin and Hanks 2013) who compete effectively in a changing academy (Evans 2004, p. 128). In addition, women academics often bear the implicit burden of providing unfunded and under-recognized mentoring, support and coordination for efforts to diversify the curriculum; this work is more likely branded as service rather than scholarship and granted little reward for promotion and evaluation.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Nancy Frasier’s (2013) recent article on the complicated and ambivalent entanglement of feminism with neoliberalism.

In this think piece, we as a group of feminist scholars from the USA present a systematic reflection on communal efforts to ensure that diversity—and related initiatives rooted in interdisciplinarity—retains value within an academy increasingly guided by market-based value systems. In the tradition of think pieces, we neither espouse objectivity, claim to make generalizations nor offer formulas or guidelines (Piantanida 2003). With this essay, our intent is to extend conversations about the academy’s evolving role within these value systems, not to be malicious or defamatory regarding any university with which we are or have been affiliated. We offer scholarly reflections bolstered by personal experiences that have afforded us an increasingly familiar critical orientation to structural processes (Ahmed 2012). Our contemplations encompass a variety of academic perspectives, as the co-authors range across four disciplines, three universities and various ranks and titles. Our personal identities likewise embody gendered, religious, sexual, and racial diversity.

In this paper, we outline our collaborative efforts and negotiations to pursue curricular advancement in diversity and culture through interdisciplinary work and community building in the face of heightened measures of economic austerity and privatization of the academy, a reality well documented in a spate of books and studies (Giroux 2002, Newfield 2008, Bauman 2011). We explore how diversity has become a contested term, repurposed and recast in the neoliberalization of higher education. When articulated with related concepts, including innovation, competition, morality, the public intellectual, interdisciplinarity and entitlements, diversity efforts present a point of resistance from which to battle the encroachment of market values on higher education. In response to calls to study this further (Evans 2004, p. ix), this paper works to contribute to critical scholarly discussions of the connection between economic austerity measures and the marginalization of diversity initiatives within the academy.

### *Austerity, culture and “doing difference” in the academy*

In times of austerity, the academy corrals marginalized areas of interdisciplinarity and diversity, bolsters traditional knowledges and disciplines and actively undermines collaborative efforts to think beyond outdated modes of organizing the academy. A culture of the mind gives way to entrepreneurship as the prevailing model for what “is done” in the academy. As Bauman (2011) attests, when this happens, the academy “has no ‘populace’ to enlighten and ennoble; it does however have clients to seduce” (p. 17).

This shift in audience bespeaks a shift in the role of the university from that of moral beacon to another competitor in the marketplace.<sup>2</sup> The knowledges produced in the humanities areas of the liberal arts do not dovetail easily with the corporate university’s expectations of assessment and data collection. A vision of the liberal arts as neutral and professional is especially crippling to academic areas that teach social justice, feminism and diversity, given their activist foundations.

---

<sup>2</sup> One humorously disconcerting manifestation of this phenomenon is the shopping cart icon that students use to register for classes at Flatpoint University. They are literally “shopping for classes.”

While most universities struggling under conditions of austerity endeavor to work around and within the financial languages of the corporate academy, it is urgent that we continue to seek alternatives to our current state of affairs. For Evans (2004), this means a rebellion:

The “ivory tower” of the academy was attacked in the past because it was perceived as irrelevant to the social world, and associated too closely with a caste of over-privileged white men. But that second association is important, because it should remind us that universities have in many ways remained servants of the same masters.<sup>3</sup> Here then, the argument is not that universities should return to a golden, ivory built past, but that they should attempt to separate themselves more than has ever been the case, from the aspirations of the market economy. (p. 45)

West and Zimmerman (1987) argue “that the ‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production” (p. 127). Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures.” They later extend this argument to include various forms of “difference” beyond gender (including race and class), and contend that “examining how [doing difference] is accomplished could reveal the mechanisms by which power is exercised and inequality is produced” (West and Fenstermaker 1995, p. 9). Here, we examine our own experience of doing difference as faculty members. Although we are often pushed to quantify and calculate the cumulative effect of specific instances of offense, it is important to unpack micro-instances of assault: from collective processes all the way through to rhetorical and symbolic meanings. Only then can we understand what it is to “do” critical scholarship around issues of diversity during times of austerity.

Ahmed (2012) validates documenting experiences of marginalized identities when she notes how

diversity work can take the form of description: it can describe the effects of inhabiting institutional spaces that do not give you residence. [ . . . ] There is a labour in having to respond to a situation that others are protected from, a situation that does not come up for those whose residence is assumed. (pp. 176–177)

Ahmed situates her study in US and UK contexts but argues for the wider relevance of diversity studies as transnational. The five authors of this paper worked together at Flatpoint University [pseudonym], a small, private university in the USA. Hailing from different disciplines but sharing an intellectual commitment to academic diversity, we were founding members of The Collaborative for Critical Inquiry into Gender, Race, Sexuality and Class. Known colloquially on campus as “The Collaborative,” we reflected a group of faculty from around the institution who created and taught a variety of core curriculum courses organized around diversity.<sup>4</sup> Since our

---

<sup>3</sup> At the same time, authors of this paper also recognize that the post-First World War growth of public higher education in the USA also accomplished upward social mobility for working class citizens.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of the creation of the Collaborative as a strategic maneuver, see Carney et al. (2012).

early years in the Collaborative, we have moved into other positions of authority, and some to other institutions, as Associate Deans, Program Directors, Department Chairs and Research Centre Director.

One of the guiding ideas in our work, at a time when we hear “the perpetual command to ‘Do More With Less’” (Bousequet 2010, p. 75), is that faculty must resist the corporatization of higher education where knowledge is viewed as a commodity of production (Bernardi and Ghelfi 2010). This paper works to defend core values of the liberal arts that posit education as a quest for self-realization and personal agency as well as civic engagement and an open democracy. Many academic studies of the current state of affairs in US and British universities highlight similar guiding principles.<sup>5</sup>

We recognize that our students live in a market-saturated culture and are formed by capitalist ideals. Compassion is viewed as a weakness, and democratic public values are scorned (Giroux 2011a) because they subordinate market considerations to the common good, a project often aligned with the work of liberal arts professors. Morality in this instance becomes painless, stripped of obligations to the other. Students are cast as crystallized individuals—tidy and autonomous consumers and subjects—who seem to lack the capacity or inclination to imagine themselves as others, which is the basis of compassion, and participatory democratic citizenship.

### *Devaluing gender studies, prioritizing “global” initiatives*

In addition to our efforts to diversify the core curriculum, we also struggled in an environment of austerity and assessment<sup>6</sup> to augment a Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies curriculum (GWSS). After the US’ civil rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, universities were challenged with righting past wrongs and opening up the ivory tower to more women, people of color and the working class:

Critical pedagogy of the 1970s and 1980s continued to hold out a vision of a society of critical philosophical subjects capable of theorizing their experience and the society and imbued with the intellectual tools and dispositions to act and intervene against oppression and for potentially yet unimagined just social arrangements. (Saltman 2012, p. 61)

However, beginning in the 1980s with Reaganomics, the cultural tide turned to a neoliberal focus and an illusory meritocracy (Darder 2012). Though the myth of the liberal academy persists

---

<sup>5</sup> See Ahmed (2012), Evans (2004), and Newfield (2010).

<sup>6</sup> Bernardi and Ghelfi (2010) refer to this as a crisis in “knowledge measurement” to valorize the immeasurable (p. 108). Bousquet (2010) asserts assessment is “easily spun to nearly any purpose by agile institutional actors” in an effort to put “labor under pressure: the instruments are supposed to be easily defeated” to demonstrate more is being done, even with less (p. 75).

through the work of David Horowitz and others, the reality is that diversity programs<sup>7</sup> such as ethnic studies and gender or queer studies have faced economic hardships. The politics of difference and the project of democratizing higher education have devolved into claims of oppressive “political correctness.”

The GWSS curriculum at Flatpoint University is historically underfunded and continually asked to assert its institutional value. Although Flatpoint was spared large budget cuts and layoffs endured by other universities, the institution has consistently demanded more work with fewer resources. In the larger context of market pressures, these constraints take place while the institution pours additional resources into athletic programming that privileges male students, creates new high-level administrator positions, funds posh Board of Trustees retreats, and undertakes office remodels for administrators.

The struggles and development of GWSS took place at the same time the University established an administrator-driven revision of the core curriculum. The then-Provost envisioned that this new core would focus on issues related to international awareness and cultural diversity, consistent with a general trend in which academic institutions reify global education compared to US domestic diversity or interdisciplinary curricular approaches to social justice, genders, women’s, ethnic, and sexuality studies curricula. Comparatively, diversity initiatives are anemic, weakened in their ability to challenge rigid hierarchies and outdated administrative structures that favor canonical ways of knowing and learning (Carney et al. 2012). Institutions have committed to a form of “diversity” that has been repackaged into marketable and digestible sound bites that are less threatening for the new “customer focused” market, while academic interrogation of systemic inequalities remains undervalued and sidelined:

Critical notions of multiculturalism and diversity in higher education have been pushed back by an economic ethos that has rendered difference a whore to its own utilitarian pursuits or an enemy of the state. In the process, scholarship and activism for structural equality, political inclusion, economic access, and human rights has given way to an emphasis on multiculturalized market niches, ... and the occasional portrayals of colored faces and celebratory rhetoric of public relations pamphlets and Web sites. (Darder 2012, pp. 412 – 413)

Efforts to promote “internationalization” at Flatpoint met with fewer obstacles.<sup>8</sup> Faculty and curricula are encouraged to include international components. Although “internationalization” of

---

<sup>7</sup> In the USA, a “department” is a group of faculty in the same discipline of study (e.g. Political Science, Biology and so on) that oversees individual courses (classes) and students majoring in that area. As new areas of knowledge develop, we add interdisciplinary “programs” such as women’s and gender studies, which draw on faculty from various existing departments.

<sup>8</sup> Evidenced by a new Center of Global Education, global initiative grants available from the Provost’s office, a Global Adventures in the Liberal Arts program, an office and director dedicated to the GHS component of the core curriculum, and an International Studies program that consolidates all non-US-focused courses offered by Flatpoint’s 12 liberal arts departments.

higher education institutions is not new, Teichler (2004) identifies the related entrepreneurial “focus on marketization, competition and management in higher education” with less concern on global understanding (2004, p. 5).

Study abroad numbers serve as a marketing tool for student recruitment. Schools report the participation numbers for public relations and trustee meetings (Engle and Engle 2003), with less regard for the quality of the experience. Across the USA, short-term study abroad trips over the summer or during a winter break are the fastest growing types of travel, usually with lower income students unable to take part and with the more economically privileged western and northern hemispheres dominating the travel locations. Despite faculty efforts, these trips can turn out to resemble more of a vacation than cultural immersion (Zemach-Bersin 2008). Study abroad is no longer under the purview of the academic disciplines dedicated to language and culture study, and linguistic and cultural immersion are now ancillary rather than integral to the experience. Regardless of this troublesome turn to use “internationalization” as a recruiting and marketing tool as opposed to international cultural understanding, the University offers higher rewards for faculty who engage in these initiatives as opposed to curricular efforts to question and dismantle the status quo.

A similar infusion of resources and administrative endorsement did not take place for gender studies or diversity curricula initiatives. Faculty involved in these efforts were sometimes questioned about their commitments to home departments and diverting energies to gender studies. This, coupled with a lack of recognition of feminist interdisciplinary scholarship, contributed to the growth and integration of international studies in a wide array of offices and departments and the circumscription and even quarantining of gender studies into a carefully monitored corner of the curriculum.

Over a decade ago, when a new director took lead of Flatpoint’s fledgling program, there was a tiny budget, no dedicated full-time faculty and no administrative support or director stipend. Over time, and with a lot of uncounted labor by a feminist collective, the number of minors grew. This growth made way for the development of an expanded curriculum and the justification to petition the male dean of the liberal arts and sciences for a full-time faculty member. Despite the fact that collectively nearly 30 faculty members from almost every college in the institution were affiliated with the program, which had provided a large number of new courses in support of the core curriculum, this request was denied.

A year later, a new female provost was hired who recognized the importance of a GWSS academic program, especially in light of Flatpoint’s abolitionist and coeducational beginnings. After years of requests, a new tenure line for GWSS finally was granted, which initiated sudden and intense interest from faculty outside the program. Several senior, male colleagues sought out GWSS leaders to express their concerns and ideas about aspects ranging from the job advertisement to the search committee. They cautioned that hiring a new GWSS colleague might be a mistake. In a world of departments, categories and streamlined reporting procedures, a faculty line in an interdisciplinary program did not make sense to them. Every move of the

program brought intense scrutiny and, perhaps unsurprisingly, emboldened colleagues with no experience or expertise in GWSS to shape the program's future. This sort of scrutiny did not plague any of the internationalization initiatives mentioned earlier, all led by males at the time.

Now, in the midst of an assault on non-vocational higher education in the USA, Flatpoint has a president with MBA credentials and an innovation fund (favoring profit-making projects),<sup>9</sup> a push for online education, and a strategic plan empty of any commitment to diversity. Similar to Bousquet's (2010) example of child care at his home institution that most cannot take advantage of because of a long waiting list but nevertheless is reified to reflect its availability, Flatpoint's GWSS program lends the University an example of its commitment to "diversity," despite its lack of meaningful institutional support.<sup>10</sup>

### *Devaluing critical scholarship: the peer evaluation process*

In this environment, the department chair is placed in a unique and precarious situation. Her role depends on a delicate dance of authority and advocacy, acquiescence and resistance, being micromanaged and being blamed for a lack of administrative vision. The university austerity measures become evident in the financial and evaluative aspects of any department committed to critical studies. The size of the budget and the criteria by which we measure "good work" are two indices of how the university redefines educational enterprise to articulate more efficiently with market values.

In this climate, the chair of a department is forced to maintain the marketability of institutional branding by addressing directives that emphasize competitive-based interaction despite a departmental commitment to revolutionary movements, transformative ideas and the pedagogy of liberation. In addition to delegating an increasing number of promotional and marketing tasks to her department faculty, and like participation in both internal and external recruitment events, she is also required to comply with an evaluative system that reduces her colleagues to a series of bullet points that fit neatly within convenient boxes to be transformed into measurable and countable indicators of effectiveness. In turn, these measures are converted into small gradations on a minimal pay increase scale that does not even meet US cost of living adjustment.

The age of austerity shifts the feminist-scholar activist/middle manager department chair into a traditional model of professional corporatized identity. In such a role, she is charged with converting the work and the intellectual identity of her peers into static categories that deny the complexities that characterize the academic work of diversity. This is similar to school reform efforts that use educational management organizations to extract profit by cutting teacher pay

---

<sup>9</sup> Administrators welcome austerity because 'It's what they know how to do; it's their whole culture, the reason for their existence, the justification for their salary and perks, the core criteria for their bonuses: the quality way, 5% or 10% cheaper every year' (Bousquet 2010, p. 78).

<sup>10</sup> As late as October 2013, Flatpoint University did establish a Commission on Diversity, but mostly in response to its accrediting body's continued low scoring of Flatpoint's efforts to address diversity.

and educational resources while relying on high teacher turnover and labor precarity (Saltman 2012, p. 4). The measurement and assessment practices of institutions in the current climate also render invisible the profile of the public intellectual, a figure predicated on the freedom to eschew such categories. As Jasbir Puar (2007) notes, compartmentalizing spheres of work and identity aligns with an agenda of converting all work into discrete and manageable items:

Intersectionality demands the knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time, relying on the logic of equivalence and analogy between various axes of identity and generating narratives of progress that deny the fictive and performative aspects of identification. (p. 212)

Colleagues must distill and contain their professional work for the year in three succinct paragraphs capped by a final paragraph summarizing their overall worthiness. Flatpoint's Political Science department, which also houses the peace and justice program, devised a statement of collective consciousness that acknowledges a focus on social justice at the forefront of its curriculum. This was done per a directive from senior management that insisted every department explain the significance of its curriculum to liberal arts values – as a marketing tool, no doubt. The problem became that Flatpoint's Political Science department, one of the most diverse in the university with a faculty predominantly of women and women-of-color, took this exercise seriously as a statement of truth about pedagogical orientation. From the perspective of neoliberalism, as Saltman states, “there is no place in this view for pedagogical theory, learning tools to interpret different pedagogical contexts, or learning how to understand how schooling relates to broader social struggles, structures and contested values” (2012, p. 18).

The evaluative practices of the yearly faculty review devalue the intellectual work and profiles disproportionately adopted by minority faculty. “If we examine critically the traditional role of the university,” writes Hooks (1994), “it is painfully clear that biases that uphold and maintain white supremacy, imperialism, sexism and racism have distorted education so that it is no longer about the practice of freedom” (p. 29). Many academics, particularly those who come out of marginalized and oppressed backgrounds, notes Hooks, look to academia as the possibility of a learning community where difference is acknowledged and embraced, and where different ways of knowing are forged in history and relations of power.

Yet, the department chair must check each box that falls along the contracted categories of teaching, scholarship and service used to determine when a faculty member “needs improvement,” “meets expectations,” “exceeds expectations,” or is “outstanding.” These systematic determinations culminate in the checking of the final box to determine a measurement of the colleague's worth for the year and going forward. A feminist, inclusive pedagogy, a commitment to a safe space, an inclination towards diversity and openness or collaborative spirit do not “count.” Translating the work of the faculty into such rubrics strengthens the agenda of the neoliberal institution and is reminiscent of what Puar (2007) observes with the co-optation of intersectionality:



As a tool of diversity management and a mantra of liberal multiculturalism, intersectionality colludes with the disciplinary apparatus of the state—census, demography, racial profiling, surveillance—in that “difference” is encased within a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid. (p. 213)

The limitations of the salary pool mean that the same global hyper-capitalist system that dictates stability relies on the necessity of an identifiable underclass and its counterpart: an extremely limited “upper-class” of “outstanding” individuals who truly raise the profile of the institution as dictated by market indicators. To department chairs, it is made clear that no more than a fraction of peer colleagues can be judged “outstanding.” Chairs are instructed not to engage in “grade inflation.” As professors, intellectuals and department chairs, we must negotiate this environment and our participation in the process that allows the institution to remain stable and financially sound, yet immobile and morally corrupt.

*Devaluing interdisciplinarity through semantics and structures*

This paper has examined how austerity compels additional challenges for nurturing diversity initiatives in university curricula. It has done so by tracking from pressures on the academy as a whole to specific contexts that pit programs against initiatives and devalue collective faculty work and peer evaluation. As roles for faculty evolve in this neoliberalist context, an age of austerity invites questions about how diversity curricula can work most effectively within today’s institutional structures.

Diversity curricula and initiatives drive interdisciplinary study of status positions such as race, class, gender, feminism and sexuality, and due to this, get questioned and at times attacked as one front of broader culture wars (Newfield 2008, pp. 267–268). Given our experiences at Flatpoint and other US institutions, questions arise about how to best position the study of feminism, identity and social justice in today’s university structures. Is, for example, women’s and/or gender and/or sexuality studies more secure as a program or as a department? Does the distinction matter when studying these diversity-oriented status positions? And is the distinction magnified and abused by administrative elites in times of economic austerity?

One way to address these questions is to make clear the difference between positioning and practice, or put differently: semantics and structure. In terms of *semantics*, perhaps “program” is preferable because it suggests flexibility and invocation of the term ‘interdisciplinarity’ that conjoins with today’s university mission statements, strategic plans and promotional materials. It also suggests a productive approach to the founding principles of the liberal arts, which espouse open-ended inquiry pursuant to the ever-evolving questions of the day. Programs draw from the departmental disciplinary structure to envision new maps and modes for inquiry.

Nevertheless, if it is true that the *structure* of the university in this age of austerity not only asserts but also applies neoliberalist imperatives for counting-based assessment (because it is

easier to assess by counting than by other mechanisms), then the distinction does come to matter. A department carries obligations and resources not beholden or available to programs. A department has a voice, a place at the table. It also is better able to control its destiny, which despite ensuing expectations for efficiency (and assessment again), allows it some agency when asserting values, priorities, processes and experiences for its students. A program, meanwhile, is more easily relegated to the margins, filling in the cracks of the curricular infrastructure.

In terms of academic semantics, occupying the margins is an asset. Cultural studies, for example, have prized its *anti*-disciplinary status, and efforts to organize more disciplinary structure are more likely to be criticized. In terms of institutional structure, though, marginality is a clear liability. Although a department may be better positioned to push back against neoliberalist values, this too is a challenge. One reason is counting-based assessment, not only in terms of curricula, but also of faculty as relayed in the previous section. The corporatization of the university steers faculty priorities that are not always in line with what we associate with the liberal arts, writes Giroux (2011a):

Beholden to corporate interests, career building and the insular discourses that accompany specialized scholarship, too many academics have become overly comfortable with the corporatization of the university and the new regimes of neo-liberal governance. Chasing after grants, promotions and conventional research outlets, many academics have retreated from larger public debates and refused to address urgent social problems.

The study of social justice, identity, activism, intersectionality and status positions in race, class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality all wither in this setting.

The value of interdisciplinarity is its potential to resist alignment with axes of privilege and address social problems. Moreover, both of these constraints—the unstable position of interdisciplinary programs devoted to identity, gender or social justice, and the pressures on faculty to measure themselves against countable, corporatized rubrics—become magnified in times of economic austerity. This is when the distinction between program and department takes greater prominence, as Giroux (2011a) observes regarding diminishing faculty engagement and social critique:

Incapable, if not unwilling, to defend the university as a democratic public sphere and a crucial site for learning how to think critically and act with civic courage, many academics have disappeared into a disciplinary apparatus that views the university not as a place to think, but as a place to prepare students to be competitive in the global marketplace.

Disciplines become safer havens in times of austerity. Programs, conversely, face the challenge of when and where to either assert or downplay their marginality. Program-based interdisciplinarity faces a paradoxical duplicity with the powers that be, a dynamic aptly noted

by Puar (2007) in her discussion on identity as a “dual process of incorporation and quarantining” (p. 29).

The founding of The Collaborative responded to these constraints while embodying this process. The Collaborative fostered critical thinking about issues and identities often lost in the disciplinary structures of today’s university. Why? Because it was an initiative that, true to its name, grew from collaborative work without boundaries. At Flatpoint, this was facilitated by its inherent structure: the Collaborative was an initiative that responded to potent calls for curriculum reform and improved university retention efforts. By result, the Collaborative incorporated itself into a structure that facilitated its spirit and semantics because, as contribution to the core curriculum, it was directed to younger, newer students less likely to demand internships, networking fairs and professionalized venues in their liberal arts education.

In times of austerity, though, this work is more likely to be quarantined. The seepage of neoliberalist priorities justifies the corporatized curricular infrastructure, which places more responsibility on departments. At many institutions, it means departments compete with each other. We all know who wins battles between business and liberal arts schools, but what happens when one liberal arts program faces off against another? In this arena, what is the place of interdisciplinary programs such as women’s, gender and sexuality studies?

Women’s and gender studies at one author’s institution, for example, is rooted in activist work, meaning that critical thinking and social critique of gendered disparity, sexual violence and intolerance of aberrant identities demand community engagement and inventive responses. A media literacy project that encourages racially marginalized young women—primary school students—to scrutinize how they are portrayed in popular media, for example, is more pedagogically complex, relationally applied and experientially understood, than it is countable. Activism projects are not necessarily tethered to a/the discipline, to the ability to easily count, and to a tangibly visible contribution to an institutional department. This kind of work more likely happens in a program with a rationale that clashes with the entrepreneurial goals of today’s university structure.

Zero-sum goals are further validated in times of austerity. Interdisciplinary viability becomes dependent on demonstrating how and when the “inter” can be incorporated and quarantined. At many universities, it becomes a game of knowing when interdisciplinarity is valued (the strategic plan and promotion of academic priorities) and when it needs to be muted, when the “inter” needs to be downplayed. Diversity practitioners learn to play the game of co-opting the term or concept that is most popular (Ahmed 2012). This, then, introduces additional questions that relate to the previous sections’ concern for program resources and faculty peer evaluation: how do we translate *cultural* and *critique*-based capital into *countable* and *counted* capital?

### *Devaluing entitlements: morality and the budget*

As this paper has largely focused on the structure of the academy and its reaction to austerity-imposed pressures to this point, this final section casts back out to the academy's ability to cope with and shape values that arise from these pressures. At various times in history, US society has made a collective statement that our core values preclude certain issues from being placed within zero-sum considerations and calculations. The original establishment of entitlements represents one of these instances. The subsequent re-appropriation of the term to signify not core values, but instead moral defects, exemplifies the criticality of semantics in austerity movements. This type of semantic manipulation has real consequences for those groups whose entitlements were intended to protect from austerity measures.

"Entitlements" in its plural form means something very specific in the USA. Before its disparagement in recent years, entitlements were an important tool for those concerned with diversity and feminism within and outside of the academy. The term was first given a specific political meaning as part of the Great Society, which comprised social improvement initiatives promoted by Lyndon B. Johnson and enacted by Democrats in the 1960s focused on education, civil rights, poverty, urban improvements and the environment. As is common with political terms, the introduction of the term "entitlements" simultaneously heralded dual meanings. Legally, they referred to government efforts and benefits that were not subject to budgetary discretion, but the term simultaneously signified benefits that were dispersed to people based on moral grounds (Quadagno 1996, Jensen 2003). To be clear, receipt of entitlements did not comment on the recipient's morality, but instead reflected the morality of the society distributing the benefits.

The case of entitlements reflects austerity's distortion of morality, moving emphasis from the public interest or shared futures towards individual shame or personal indignation. Giroux (2011b) explains:

What should be clear is that the politics of austerity is not about rethinking priorities to benefit the public good. Instead, it has become part of a discourse of shame, one that has little to do with using indignation to imagine a better world. On the contrary, shame is now used to wage a war...on those considered other rather than on the underlying structures and ideologies of various forms of state and individual racism.

If entitlements are allocations that (1) represent the morality/values of the larger institution, and so much so, that (2) they are not subject to budgetary discretion, they pose a special opportunity for institutions to confront and challenge this shift. Specifically, they offer academic institutions the opportunity to actually enact stated or ideological commitments to diversity and gender equity. However, academia has followed the larger society's lead. Many of the original entitlements established by the Great Society have lost their original status. In the past 5 years education, civil rights and poverty initiatives have fallen under budgetary scrutiny and have been

subjected to major budget cuts. More importantly, the connotation of these entitlements has shifted from reflecting society's values to commenting on a recipient's worth.

It is difficult to think of one previous entitlement in academia that has not been subjected to this shift. At some institutions, affirmative action admission processes have been discontinued because of their supposed support for "under-qualified" (read: unworthy) students and for the costs associated with admitting lower income students (Zamani and Brown 2003). In a zero-sum game of funding, new faculty hiring practices have diverted portions of affirmative action funds to support and encourage men to enter women-dominated fields. The unacknowledged distinction between these efforts and women-specific efforts is the glass escalator: substantial evidence that the men will be directed to the top of women-dominated fields at a faster pace than their colleagues, and will make more money than them at each floor (Williams 1992).

A few years ago, similar issues came to a head in a dispute within Flatpoint's student government. After two attempts at running for the post and a structural change in the voting process that restricted voting to student government officers, a white young man was elected Vice President of Diversity. This student had never served on a committee on diversity nor did he hold membership in an affinity organization. In one of his first acts as Vice President, he distributed a large portion of the student government's diversity funding to white fraternities. In his assessment, white men represented a numerical minority on campus, which placed them in the same category as black sororities. Furthermore, he claimed, the fraternities' programming was "more advanced" and "fit better" with the institution's goals of quality educational experiences. Although there was some public outcry from students, and several faculty members spoke out about this as an example of inequality being inscribed into structural practices, the new voting and funding processes remain unchanged.

This instance represents an extreme example of the core meaning of entitlements being eroded. That is, student government had put aside a consistent sum of money for diversity programming (representing one of its core values) that was protected from other budget considerations for student government activities. However, for the past 5 years, it has also enacted an internal decision-making process that directly contradicts these intentions. Ultimately, it has led the title of Diversity Programming to be changed to REACH: Respecting Embracing and Achieving Community Harmony. The bulk of the publicly available REACH funding application and process forms consist of budgetary questions. Not one question determines whether the event relates in any way to women, sexual minorities or ethnic and racial minorities, as was originally intended.

The privileging of specific event monies over externalities of student events reflects a typical austerity measure. It also represents typical ways that austerity measures ignore externalities as "product[s] of economic activity which [are] not captured in the producer's market transactions" (Crouch 2011, p. 12). Entitlements were established to ensure that externalities tied to core values were not subjected to measures based on market transactions. The erosion of the original intent of entitlements is occurring throughout academia and larger US society.

This erosion is partially due to the explicit goal of moving education from a public good intended to produce empowerment to a private good intended to instill marketable skills. As a “takeover of the means to reshape the minds of coming generations” (Wolin 2008, p. 213), these efforts have turned the term “entitlements”—and its derivations—into a dirty or slanderous word, and has effectively silenced entire cultural and political discourses on inequality and equity. More importantly, it has removed a method of holding institutions inside and outside of the academy accountable for actually enacting programs that reflect their espoused values. The vilification of entitlements continues to allow institutions to semantically value diversity, but structurally does nothing to ensure that lived experience within their confines reflects this commitment.

### *Conclusion*

A recent study concludes that interdisciplinarity is not rewarded in the academy (Kniffin and Hanks 2013). Although graduate students and full professors, already tenured and lacking further ranks of promotion, are more likely to pursue interdisciplinary work, tenure-seeking assistant professors are not. “For all the rhetoric about interdisciplinary work in academe, it may be that only senior scholars don’t pay a penalty” (Jaschik 2013). This part of the curriculum drives diversity efforts and what Newfield (2008) calls “anti-determinist thinking,” which cultivates a “nonmarket understanding of value and mode of life” (p. 144). Conditions of austerity impose pressures on this way of thinking, which this paper has sought to develop on different fronts.

One cannot discuss austerity’s effect on the academy without considering these market conditions. For the university, the liberal arts, and, most acutely, the study of women, feminism, gender and/or sexuality, austerity metastasizes ongoing tensions centered on the role of diversity in higher education curricula. Feminists, diversity practitioners, humanities-based interrogators, social justice initiatives and liberal arts modes of inquiry are targeted when the neoliberal academy holds high the mantle of economic austerity and entrepreneurial exigence. Austerity is used to rationalize neoliberalist values. This paper has developed the need to historicize and critically analyze these values and the collective and process-oriented natures of feminist subjectivities, social justice and activism. Diversity efforts rely on collective inquiry and shared priorities. Our hope is that this recognition of austerity as neoliberalist rationale yields fruitful responses to entrepreneurial priorities as well as viable and secure positioning for future diversity practitioners.

### *References*

1. Ahmed, S., 2012. *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Durham: Duke University Press.
2. Bauman, Z., 2011. *Culture in a liquid modern world*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
3. Bernardi, C. and Ghelfi, A., 2010. We won’t pay for your crisis, we will create institutions of the common. *Edu-Factory Web Journal: The Double Crisis*, 108–118. Available from: <http://www.edu-factory.org/edu15/webjournal/n0/Bernardi-Ghelfi.pdf>

4. Bousquet, M., 2010. After cultural capitalism: Never let a good crisis go to waste. *Edu-Factory* [online], 0, 74–89. Available from: [http://marcbousquet.net/pubs/Never\\_Let\\_A\\_Good\\_Crisis.pdf](http://marcbousquet.net/pubs/Never_Let_A_Good_Crisis.pdf) [Accessed 24 April 2014].
5. Carney, T., Geertsema-Sligh, M., Savage, A. and Sluis, A., 2012. Defying borders: Bringing feminist pedagogy and women's history into a new core curriculum. *Journal for Excellence in College Teaching*, 23 (4), 127–144.
6. Crouch, C., 2011. Brand values. *RSA Journal*, 157, 10–13.
7. Darder, A., 2012. Neoliberalism in the academic borderlands: An on-going struggle for equality and human rights. *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, 48, 412–426.
8. Engle, L. and Engle, J., 2003. Study abroad levels: Toward a classification of program types. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 9 (1), 1–20.
9. Evans, M., 2004. *Killing thinking: the death of the universities*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
10. Frasier, N., 2013. How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden—and how to reclaim it. *The Guardian*, October 13 [online]. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/feminism-capitalist-handmaiden-neoliberal> [Accessed 12 November 2013].
11. Giroux, H., 2002. Neoliberalism, corporate culture, and the promise of higher education: The university as a democratic public sphere. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72 (4), 425–464.
12. Giroux, H., 2011a. Beyond the swindle of the corporate university: Higher education in the service of democracy. *Truthout*, January 18 [online]. Available from: <http://www.truthout.org/opinion/item/69:beyond-the-swindle-of-the-corporate-university-higher-education-in-the-service-of-democracy> [Accessed 12 November 2013].
13. Giroux, H., 2011b. Trickle-down cruelty and the politics of austerity. *The Oldspeak Journal*, July 11 [online]. Available from: <http://theoldspeakjournal.wordpress.com/tag/u-s-public-debt/> [Accessed 12 November 2013].
14. Hooks, B., 1994. *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
15. Jaschik, S., 2013. Interdisciplinary penalty. *Inside Higher Ed* [online]. Available from: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/10/31/study-finds-phds-who-write-interdisciplinary-dissertations-earn-less?width1/4775&height1/4500&iframe1/4true> [Accessed 31 October 2013].
16. Jensen, L., 2003. *Patriots, settlers, and the origins of American social policy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
17. Kniffin, K.M. and Hanks, A.S., 2013. *Boundary spanning in academia: Antecedents and near-term consequences of academic entrepreneurialism* [online]. Cornell Higher Education Research Institute. Available from: [http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/cheri/upload/cheri\\_wp158.pdf](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/cheri/upload/cheri_wp158.pdf) [Accessed 20 December 2013].
18. Newfield, C., 2008. *Unmaking the public university: The forty-year assault on the middle class*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

19. Newfield, C., 2010. The structure and silence of cognitariat. *Edu-Factory* [online], 0, 10–26. Available from: [www.edu-factory.org/edu15/webjournal/n0/Newfield.pdf](http://www.edu-factory.org/edu15/webjournal/n0/Newfield.pdf) [Accessed 12 November 2013].
20. Piantanida, M., 2003. A think piece on think pieces. *Invitation to Study Group (Commissioned by the School Performance Network)* [online], 0, 3–8. Available from: <http://www.docs-r-us.com/pdffiles/SG%20Piantanida%20.pdf> [Accessed 10 November 2013].
21. Puar, J.K., 2007. *Terrorist assemblages: homonationalism in queer times*. Durham: Duke University Press.
22. Quadagno, J., 1996. Social security and the myth of the entitlement “Crisis”. *The Gerontologist*, 36, 391-399.
23. Saltman, K., 2012. *The failure of corporate reform*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
24. Teichler, U., 2004. The changing debate on internationalization of higher education. *Higher Education*, 48, 5-26.
25. West, C. and Fenstermaker, S., 1995. Doing difference. *Gender & Society*, 9 (1), 8-37.
26. West, C. and Zimmerman, D.H., 1987. Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1 (2), 125-151.
27. Williams, C.L., 1992. The glass escalator: Hidden advantages for men in the “female” professions. *Social Problems*, 39 (3), 253-267.
28. Wolin, S., 2008. *Democracy incorporated: Managed democracy and the specter of inverted totalitarianism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
29. Zamani, E.M. and Brown, M.C., 2003. Affirmative action in postsecondary educational settings: The historic nexus of meritocracy and access in US higher education. *Higher Education Policy*, 16, 27-38.
30. Zemach-Bersin, T., 2008. American students abroad can’t be “global citizens”. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54 (26), A34.